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W. E. H.

An

Essay on Bilious Fever

By

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Of

Frederick County

Virginia

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Bilious Fever

We still have the old adage by us
Nil dictum, quod non dictum prius
In commencing the description & treat-
ment of a disease I am well aware of
the almost insurmountable difficulties
which I have to encounter being practically
unacquainted with the stages of diseases &
the remedies suited to them — I shall however
console myself with the reflection that the
practice of medicine is not intuitive, & that
I am addressing gentlemen who know that
the speculative illusions of theorists although
mighty on paper will avail nothing by the
sick bed, when the prospects of a rising
family & perhaps the life of a very dear
friend depend upon the knowledge that
you may have acquired of others or your
own personal experience — You gentle-
men must expect nothing from me but
plain matter of fact; I shall give you —

alone my idea of ~~the~~ origin of this disease attested by the observations of others & the treatment that I conceive the most judicious without being a slave to the opinions of any set of men or school calling from all, whom I have considered distinguished in the practice of this disease viz bilious fever as it occurred in the United States & particularly in the valley of Virginia — That this disease has been epidemic since the discovery of this country is a fact known to all, but it is only within a few years past that it has made its appearance in the valley with the exception of the year eighteen hundred & four, it would seem that our mountains presented an insurpassable into disease of almost every kind, until this modern Hannibal spread desolation among us, to use the language of an eloquent

writer, forcing the few diseases that formerly prevailed to wear its livery— But our Physicians Maximus like particularly the gentleman, with whom I had the honour of studying have completely divested it of its terrific garb & unless it should insidiously prevent itself, we have nothing to fear as there was very little mortality during the last season & that principally confined to the poor who are generally deprived of the comforts & necessaries of life— I would set it down as an axiom that bilious fever is the child of Miasmata, which of itself is produced from the combination of heat, moisture & vegetable matter if I did not think that a premiss broadly asserted ought to be supported by well attested facts—

The most essential circumstance

connected with its origin is that heat seems necessary to its production – Cold climates are always exempt from it, the farther you go south the violence of the disease seems to move in a progressive ratio; it never ~~commences~~ in the winter & when raging in the fall it is always suspended by the first frost – Heat will not however alone produce this disease The hottest seasons are the most healthy, Lind says that the dry season in Senegal the hottest part of the year is healthy, the Arabs living in the parched deserts are always healthy, & the English who have trading companies on the African coast are healthy untill the rainy season comes on, in Africa heat & ~~sickness~~ health are synonymous & it only upon the coming on of the wet season that sickness is produced – In the valley the same thing

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occurs, our driest & hottest seasons are the most healthy, except our rivers & marshes. Harper's Ferry afforded a striking example during the last season — the river being unusually low, the month of August always dry & hot is uniformly exempt from disease & it is only after our periodical rains that bilious fever in a pestilential appearance — It appears from the foregoing that moisture is also necessary for the production of this disease but moisture in excess so far from producing it, acts beneficially. Rush says that the marshes of Delaware are always healthy whenever flooded — The inhabitants of Breda & Brabant have arrested bilious fevers by inundating their marshes — Dazille says that the marshes at Cayenne when inundated are more healthy than at

any other time — Excessive rains long continued, always insures health to those living upon water courses, this was particularly observed at Shepherdstown & Harpers Ferry during our sickly seasons, while the bilious fever was moving with giant strides, through our valleys these places on account of the inundation of their rivers were entirely exempt from disease, but conversely they are always sickly in proportion to the drought — Something more than heat & moisture is then necessary for its production. This I think may be easily shown I think by attending to the different situations that are most liable to it, & the circumstances connected with those situations. We find that both in

the old & new worlds that all those cities which have been the graves of unnumbered thousands were situated upon marshes or rivers — In the fall of eighteen hundred & twenty five this disease prevailed very extensively upon the Shenandoah while in Charlestown only six miles distant, there were three cases, two physicians & a sheriff — those diseases frequently called the fever, rendering it possible that these cases were contracted there — The above testimony clearly shows that bilious fever is a miasmatic origin but I think it nothing but fair to mention that some have supposed that mineral exhalations have induced the agent as important to its production,

that our valley contains no mines or our mountains where it is probable minerals exist are generally healthy except those that lie adjacent to the river — It has been disputed & it is still a moot point, whether animal putrefaction has produced this disease; the weight of testimony on both sides seems to incline rather to the former — Gaines says that "the putrefaction of trees felt on burned on the soil & cattle have caused this disease, it is, however, also stated in this report, but contrary to Forsters, who says he was an eye witness to one thus produced, the putrefaction of a whale is said to have produced an epidemic in Philadelphia or the eastern states & fever is said to have been produced by the putrefaction

or rather the malignant fever that prevailed in Pensacola was ascribed to the same cause — I with certainly all this weight of authority, I think, conclusively, perhaps that the foregoing opinion is commercial, exclusively the health annihilations of men who in their endeavours to save favourite theories in preference to their reason for that animal satisfaction coexisting with Cicero, as merely accidental is proved by the written fact that the land living in rivers is literally covered with filth for the purpose of manure during the summer & singular as it may appear there never has been a case produced by it — I could bring forward other proof to substantiate the above premises, such as injecting rotten leaves & the vegeto animal —

putrefactive fever produced by our stables, but I think the one mentioned so triumphant, that additional proof would be superfluous — Diagnosis This disease may known, by the prevalence of bilious matter the season of the year & the prevailing sickness — The symptoms were Dizziness, pain in the head, aching, coins aching in the bones, alternate changes of heat & cold, stiffness in the eyes, dulness, languor of the body, yawning & stretching ~~with~~ the tongue covered with a yellow & greenish hue with the sense of bitterness in the mouth & the skin sallow. It is then ushered in with a coldness over the body which is mainly succeeded by the heat becoming [illegible] — The patient

may be considered as doing well. Then after a few days, if the pain in his head becomes easy, his skin moist & the pulse soft & slow. — But if delirium, subsultus tendinum & coma occur, & the pulse become uneasy, & still continue, your patient's life is in jeopardy. — The first thing to be attended to in the treatment of this disease is to moderate vascular action, to effect which there is no thing like blood letting, this may be either local or general. — If the pulse is full — strong with a hard skin, the face flushed & the eyes with an aversion of light & wandering delirium it entitles you to make some permanent impression on the system. Feelings of my patient, in my opinion one, your lancing is much

more effectual, than small bleedings
frequently repeated — But as Dr Fordyce
most wisely remarks, we must use
the lancet with judgment tempered
by discretion — I have seen from
the use of it in general, not alone
particular symptoms, we must use
great discretion in accomplishing
which, we must resort to cupping,
a remedy, which seldom fails to
produce the desired effect — Some
times an next in utility, they are
very beneficial; by directly withdrawing the
stomach of offensive matter, which
sometimes totally excludes it out of
the way, but the system. I have seen
patients after the operation, in some
cases, have had a slight relapse
with a short vomiting, headach, this
thing, in fact, amenable to such rule as

moment, directly become composed all unpleasant symptoms leaving them & with a moist soft skin gradually sinking into a sweet calm sleep — I have no much confidence in this class of remedies that I consider them as almost specific in this disease, certainly I would never mind them without there was a constitutional objection, such as serious inflammatory, internal inflammation, or a strong predisposition to apoplexy, as regards the continuance of this remedy, it would depend altogether upon the effect induced. The last emetic that I have seen tried is the one recommended by Dr Coleman, a combination of ipecacuanha & T. Emetic twenty or thirty minims or two of the latter, the disease quiets immediately & generally to

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the emetic, whilst the Antimony remains a sufficient time to evacuate the stomach properly. — I have also seen in time effect from artificial cholera in this disease, produced by combining Calomel & Tartar — Cathartics are not in efficacy they prove beneficial by evacuating the alimentary canal of bile & other offensive matter; as there is generally much excitement in this disease at the beginning, & as there are exacerbations & remissions Dr Craig's mode advises us to watch for the remission before we give our medicine as it is apt to be quickly ejected, or remain in a quiescent state upon the stomach, would it not be proper to economize time instead of waiting for the remission, as the salts are said to reduce action, to prevent the rapidity

articles by a dose of some one of them such as salts & senna — The best Cathartic is a combination of calomel & jalap or rhubarb, & when in its operation by some of the saline articles, I have seen great benefit, derived from a mixture recommended by Dr Chapman, & known by Glauber salts, Tartar emetic, lemon juice & water, given in divided doses, this not only serves as a gentle evacuation, but it removes constriction of the extreme vessels & thereby produces a moist skin — Dr Rush recommends in inflammatory which I think highly, we use in this case, calomel, jalap, & lower terminating in bark, I have seen great relief results from bleeding in the manifest relief of the patient — As the fever progresses we must resort to tonics [illegible] in the

stomach is in a very irritable state — sometimes it is absolutely necessary on account of our inability to get the medicine to produce the desired effect — As regards the continuance of the cathartics, I would continue them as long as my patient had a bad tongue — sallow complexion & dark & fetid stools, It is here that calomel given in minute doses shews itself to be the Sovereign of the materia Medica, after having administered a sufficient quantity it must then be worked off by salts combined with Castor — Diaphoretics are next highly important remedies in this disease, but there are no remedies that I would be more cautious in using, as they have been found by experience to aggravate all the symptoms when

given at an early time — They produce their beneficial effect by diminishing the quantity of circulating blood, & by increasing or improving the secretion, determining the blood from the viscera to the extreme vessels — The best diuretics are the squills, nitre & cream of tartar, & under the value of the former is inestimable. It must be given from a grain to an eighth of a grain — As to the operation of this medicine & Digitalis with Dr Cheyne that it produces its effects specifically & not by increasing or lessening muscular power, I am not dissatisfied with this opinion in the present state of our knowledge on the subject — I am in opposition to the opinion of Dr Cheyne

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Sometimes the stomach being too irritable, we are unable to give antimony, we must then substitute something that will be equally as efficacious to produce vomiting, irritation being allayed by sweet spirits of nitre or tart. in mist. vinum. If in there is too much excitement the remedies mentioned above must be laid aside & Rushes powder substituted in their place, the calomel & tartar being omitted according to circumstances; as an assistant to the above I have seen the most decided benefit accrue from the application of ice & cold water & ice water & ice upon the forehead but this was only when there was a great heat of heat

& a determination to the head, it reduced the circulation caused perspiration & composed the patient to sleep — Next there has been much disputation about the propriety of using blisters & there are has been objected to by very high authority but I would use them against all authority except ocular demonstration, believing if the system is properly prepared by evacuation, that they equalize the circulation & destroy the germs of morbid afferentation — This disease is frequently kept up from a dire and state of the liver, we must have recourse to Calomel as a dernier ressource & gently salivate our patient this hardly fails to restore him to health — As to the treat-

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ment during convalescence, the whole secret consists in attending strictly to the patients diet, in giving bark or its essence Quinine & in the use of old porter or wine & by attending to the bowels, if this treatment is strictly continued we need never fear a relapse ——

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